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Testimony of Amy Mason-Mann in Support of HB6759 An Act Concerning Early Childhood

Senator McCrory, Representative Curry, Ranking members Berthel and McCarty and members of the Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on HB6759 An Act Concerning Early Childhood.

My name is Amy Mason-Mann and I am the Director of The Nest at Alphabet Academy, a high-quality early childhood program that serves families with children 6 weeks to 3 years of age. I live in Guilford and work in New Haven.

I want to thank you for recognizing in section 1 of this bill that compensation for early educators is the issue facing the early care and education sector. The rapid increase in entry level wages throughout the economy has left early care programs struggling to retain and attract staff.

In the past three years, as Director of an Infant/Toddler program, I have witnessed an increase in turnover since COVID and have found it quite difficult to find and sustain qualified teachers interested in working in this struggling field. The new generation of our youth don't want to work in the demanding, underpaid occupation of early childhood. This leaves current teachers to work physically demanding and emotionally draining long hours. They are tired and overextended and sacrificing their own well-being, and that of their families, in order to care for our most vulnerable citizens.

As their leader, I have sacrificed a great deal myself, to provide the teachers and staff of my program with a strong foundation and base to help them feel safe and secure enough to fight for a field they love. Working long exhausting hours week after week, in order to relieve teachers or provide them with desperately needed mental health breaks has become the norm. They are struggling. I watch them cry for reduced hours, spend time seeking relief in the demands, only to have their colleagues abandon the field for their own personal relief. We have been working in crisis for years now. It is time for change. Because if things don't change soon, the early childhood education and child care industry is going to collapse.

What is missing from this bill is the way in which this will be paid for. I urge you to support increased funding for the state funded early care programs and the creation of a wage equity fund similar to what was created in Washington DC to increase wages for early educators without adding to the child care cost burden that families and centers already face.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,
Amy Mason-Mann, MS Ed